gather

November 2011



Are You Marked? Riding Out the Storm When We Gather
The Power of Parables

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Editor Kate Sprutta Elliott Managing Editor Terri Lackey Editor, *Café* Elizabeth McBride

Art Direction On Track Marketing Cover Eleonora Ghioldi gathermagazine.org

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VOICES

Remembering and Giving Thanks

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

November is a month

of gathering and remembering. November 1, we observe All Saints Day and remember those who have gone before us in the faith. Later in the month, we celebrate Thanksgiving—a time of gathering with family and friends and giving thanks for the many blessings of this life.

In "When We Gather," Gwen Sayler writes about the regular meeting of a group of Valparaiso (Indiana) University deaconesses. She recounts a time when one of the sisters was dying and the group came together to be with her one last time. Gwen reminds us, "When we gather together for study, prayer, and conversation, we call present the generations of women who have gathered before us, leaving us the legacy we will pass on to those who follow us."

The legacy of faithful women continues long after they are gone. In "Are You Marked?" Valora Starr tells about her Grandma Betty whose witness taught the young Valora about discipleship. "It was clear that she was a woman of God and a disciple of Jesus. This source of strength and confidence was conveyed to me in quiet conversations while she gave her hair its nightly brushing or while she snapped green beans on the porch. In the morning, when I would tiptoe to the kitchen to find breakfast, she sat at the table with her hands folded in prayer."

So how do we share our faith story like Grandma Betty to help others see how our relationship with Jesus makes a difference in our lives? Diane Monroe writes in "This is My Story" that we can "... share our faith with our family, friends, colleagues, and even casual acquaintances. We reveal our basic posture toward life when our fears, our source of trust and strength, our dreams, and our hopes are communicated in stories and conversation."

In the Bible study we travel with Jesus as he moves through the region of Galilee teaching. Some of the lessons occur as people gather in the synagogue, but much of Jesus' teaching takes place while he is on the move. Writer Patricia Lull tells us, "In these passages, Mark shows us...that Jesus is one who has power and authority. His is the power to calm a stormy sea and the power to restore people to wholeness of life."

Sometimes we feel like the disciples who feared the storm as Jesus slept in the boat. In "Riding out the Storm," Susan Greeley encourages us to consider the spiritual disciplines that Jesus practiced and to embrace them for ourselves as a way to prepare for those stormy times in our lives: "Time and again we're told that he would steal away by himself to pray. It was clear from his teaching in the synagogue that he was well-versed in the Torah, '...for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.' (Matthew 7:29)."

Whether gathered together or in the quiet of our hearts, we give thanks for the faith stories that have nurtured us. May we be grateful for the witness or those who have walked with us. WE Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of Gather. You may

contact her at gather@elca.org.



GIVE US THIS DAY

A Modern-Day Parable

y Barbara Berry-Bailey

There was a man who

was very poor his entire childhood. As a young man, he worked hard to achieve the things he never had as a boy. In time, he had all that he always wanted: a loving family (with all the dynamics that come with family), a beautiful home, (with all the work that comes with keeping a home beautiful), and a good job that paid him lots of money (with all the employee conflicts that come with a high-paying job).

But as he aged, this man was not content. He wanted his family to be more like other families: his wife did not understand him; his son failed to seek the employment he wished for him; the house always needed work. The man disliked his boss and co-workers. He wanted to earn more money and he considered his benefit package lousy. He grumbled about what he did not have. And what he did have, he thought of as the fruit of his own hard work, not a blessing.

Then one day while driving home from his job, an event over which he had no control happened: He was struck by a car that ran a stop sign. He lay in the hospital at the point of death. When he regained consciousness, he opened his eyes to see his wife asleep at his bedside, her hand covering his. His room was filled with get well cards, balloons, and flowers from co-workers. He realized then how lucky he was to have even mediocre health care benefits. And when he was discharged, his son, the fireman, picked him up and took him to his nice, beautiful home.

It took a life-threatening crash for this man to realize that the grace of God was not only about surviving the accident, not only about his family's love for him, not only about his co-workers enduring (and perhaps, caring for) him. He finally realized that God's grace surrounded him even in his impoverished childhood. It was this poverty that gave him the impetus to make a better life for himself and his family.

And he also realized he was meant to be an instrument of grace for those whose paths he crossed.

We are blessed to be a blessing regardless of the amount of money we have in the bank. We are blessed to be a blessing regardless of *who* waits for us at the end of the day: man, woman, dog or cat, or *where* they wait—home, happy hour, or Bible study.

The opening of the rite for the Burial of the Dead in the *Lutheran Book* of *Worship* says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of all mercy and the God of all consolation. He comforts us in all our sorrows so that we can comfort others in their sorrows with consolation we ourselves have received from God through God's messengers."

Wake up before these words are spoken over you.

The Rev. Barbara Berry-Bailey is manager for companionship, education, and advocacy for Africa in the ELCA Global Mission unit. She is ever grateful for all her blessings, especially her children through whom she has truly learned what grace is all about.



Are You Marked?

by Valora K Starr

Grandma Betty, a farmer born barely after slavery ended, was a real disciple. As I got older I realized that we didn't have much time together, but the years we did have shaped my faith in a profound way. I wanted to be like her, despite the physical evidence of the hardships of being a woman, because she moved with a confidence and assurance that was compelling. It was clear that she was a woman of God and a disciple of Jesus. This source of strength and confidence was conveyed to me in quiet conversations while she gave her hair its nightly brushing or while she snapped green beans on the porch. In the morning, when I would tiptoe to the kitchen to find breakfast, she sat at the table with her hands folded in prayer. Jesus was her friend, teacher, and savior, and she assured me that he was mine.

Betty was a great disciple and teacher, and I have spent most of my adult life getting to know her through stories told by my mom, her brothers, and my older cousins. I've asked her what she would do more times than I remember. I look for what would motivate her in a given situation. I continue to practice what she taught me leading me deeper in Christian discipleship.

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

Now, whenever I hear the words of the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authorty in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go herefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing hem in the name of the Father and of the Son and of he Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything hat I have commanded you; and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age," I always think of Grandma Betty because her example helped me realize hat disciples make disciples.

A disciple is a student who follows the teachings nd practices of a teacher. We can follow the teachings nd practices of many people—Oprah, Facebook, Twiter, diets, sports, etc., and these teachers come and go. Iuman teachers have a limit to the knowledge they can mpart to a student. Grandma Betty moved me to be a lisciple of Jesus.

During the time of Jesus, disciples had to master the eachings of the teacher and pass the test for disciples efore they were called "disciples." This process took ears. Jesus invited the disciples—and many others long the way—to embark on a faith journey as they earned about his ministry. Each disciple responded with a resounding "Yes!" Consequently, we can say that Christian discipleship is a lifelong journey of living out and spreading the good news of Jesus Christ so that thers may believe.

Others can tell whose student you are by what ou say and do. Oprah's followers watched her show veryday, used her favorite things, and gave to her ngel's Network. Facebook and Twitter disciples chat ith friends, poke one another, and post thoughts for ther followers to enjoy. So—could you be identified as Christian disciple?

What marks you and identifies you as a disciple? Vell, Twitter disciples are never without a cell phone.

/HAT ARE MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP?

There are no physical marks that identify a disciple, only certain practices that disciples engage in as any follow Jesus. Jesus invited the disciples to join

him for the journey, and then he modeled for them seven practices that we can call the seven marks of discipleship: praying, studying, inviting, worshiping, encouraging, serving, and giving. They are essential to effectively accomplishing Jesus' great commission in today's world.

We too are invited to embark on this faith journey. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus has left for us a trail of examples of how disciples are to carry out the great commission and command (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8). It is an intentional act to claim the life of a disciple and the seven marks of discipleship. And it is a life-long commitment, not a temporary assignment. Nor can it be accomplished alone: Jesus invited the disciples to be part of his mission and ministry in community.

Contemporary disciples are marked by living out the seven faith practices within the context of the great commission. If we do not include these faith practices in our daily discipleship, it may not be clear whose disciples we are.

We are blessed today to have these marks identified for us to support us in our calling to be disciples. Christian disciples must discover or recover the seven marks (or faith practices) of discipleship, practice the seven marks of discipleship in daily ministry, and empower others to boldly live out their faith in Jesus Christ making more disciples.

Who would say yes to a new job or enroll in a class with no intentions of completing the assignments? Whether or not you can identify the Christian who helped disciple you, our teacher, Jesus, commands us to make disciples. It is our work and with practice the assignment gets easier.

Grandma Betty had a saying "being born in an oven doesn't make you a biscuit." Disciples are made through practice. I watched her practice and embody these seven marks of discipleship and she did make more disciples.

Valora K Starr is Women of the ELCA director for discipleship.

Seven Marks of Discipleship

Praying is important in the life of a disciple. Jesus' ministry was centered in a life of prayer. He constantly prayed to God (Luke 5:16). When one of the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, Jesus taught the disciples how to be in communion with God.

Studying God's word in community is one mark of discipleship. When Jesus was about 12, he went to the temple to study and listen to the elders (Luke 2:41–51). It is important to be with each other so that as we study God's word and pray, we grow in faith together. Community is the activator that encourages us and others to grow.

Inviting others to God's feast is essential to accomplishing the mission of a disciple. Jesus commands that we make more dis-

ciples. But unlike other teachers, Jesus simply invited others to follow him. We can also invite others to follow Jesus.

Worshiping God builds and strengthens a disciple's connection to and relationship with both God and the community of faith. Jesus, the Son of God, made worship central in his life and ministry (Luke 4:16) and worshiping God in community is a regular practice in the lives of Jesus' disciples.

Encouraging others is work disciples can only do in community. Consider Jesus' example of encouragement as a natural part of teamwork and motivation to get the job done. In the faith community, encouragement is not just a pep talk—it is an affirmation and blessed assurance of what God can do in our lives.

serving is at the heart of Jesus' ministry. A disciple's goal is to do as the teacher does. Jesus was a walking example of committing one's life to serving God's people—healing the sick, teaching, feeding, showing compassion, and praying for the people he came in contact with. Jesus calls us to think differently about how and why we serve others. Serving as Jesus served brings us closer to Jesus, the one who did not come to be served but to serve.

Giving is a heart exercise and one of God's unexplainable mysteries. However, the mystery is that when we give generously and freely, the more there is to give. This practice is too complex for our heads but not for our hearts. Our attitudes about giving and its importance to God's plan are more important than the amounts we give. (Luke 21:1–2)

DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCE

Life as a disciple is being God's hands and feet in the world. The activities of ministry are more than just projects to keep disciples busy—we are engaged in ministry for the sake of the world.

The Women of the ELCA resource "Lessons for Today's Disciples" will help you discover, practice, and be empowered by the

seven marks of discipleship: praying, studying, inviting, worshipings encouraging, serving, and giving. Use it individually or as a group study. This free resource can be downloaded at www.womenofthe elca.org, click on "Program Resources for You and Your Women's Group."

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by Diane Monroe

THIS IS MY STORY

When was the last time you told a friend, "Have I got some news for you?" or "I cannot wait to tell you all about..."? Our

world is filled with our stories—books, news reports, blogs, e-mail, Facebook posts, YouTube, TV programs, the latest gossip. Watch people in conversation. They never grow weary of telling their own story—they tell about their experiences with excitement. Because they

We hear and repeat stories all the time. But there is one story that is different from all the rest. It is the story of God's love for us and God's actions in Christ for our

tell their own story, they are involved, alive in the story,

and eager for others to share what happened to them.

"... FOR WE CANNOT KEEP FROM SPEAKING ABOUT WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD." ACTS 4:20

salvation. We know the wondrous things God has done and is doing in our life and in our world. As people of that

story, we can't be shy on-lookers. We are called to claim it, embrace it, live it, tell it and retell it—"for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

CLAIM THE STORY

Through the waters of baptism, God claims us and sets us apart as a particular kind of person—a beloved child. Those who have been baptized are called to live out the meaning of this identity as we name and claim God's

tory as our own. When I see a young man wearing a rarmulke or a woman dressed in traditional Muslim ijabs I'm given an immediate insight into their reliious heritage. An ELCA bishop tells how he stopped y the local butcher shop after an Ash Wednesday ervice. The clerk, noticing the dusty grey mark on his orehead, greeted his long-time customer with a friendy "I didn't know you were a Christian!" The invisible attoo given us in baptism is a mark of our identity in Christ. We are compelled to live as if it were clearly visole like the Ash Wednesday smudge on our foreheads. will never be removed. We simply cannot be content let God's love dead-end in our hearts. We need to let course through our words, attitudes, and actions so re are telling the story everywhere and everyway, even hen we don't think anybody is watching.

MBRACE THE STORY

Ve embrace God's story by living it. While that statenent may seem a bit trite or even confusing, it is reathtaking to imagine the endless possibilities of how ndividually and communally we are beckoned to naviate our day-to-day lives grounded and fueled by God's we and grace. Martin Luther said, "It is by living and lying that one becomes a theologian." Here are a few camples of how we embrace God's story as our own our daily rhythms and rituals.

RECOGNIZING AND ARTICULATING GOD'S PRESENCE IN HE ORDINARY. For so many of us, the hymn "Borning ry" prompts a deeply emotional response. The music moving, yet it is those poetic lyrics by John Ylvisaker at catch us off guard every time and make us tear-up. this hymn, God is reminding us of a holy presence at surrounds us at the most important occasions in ar lives.

Now, it is our job to help Ylvisaker write hundreds other verses by recognizing God's activity, God's ill, God's purpose, and God's love and grace in everyday moments. God is with us at the grocery store, in the tears of a loved one, among the bright green sprouts in the garden, as we pause before making a difficult phone call, or in that quick sprint to chase a wayward umbrella down the street.

BY ENGAGING IN THE PRACTICES OF FAITH. We journey with fellow followers of Christ, mutually equipping and encouraging one another to grow as disciples in a fuller expression of a life-style that is Christ's-style. We do that best when we ourselves seek a growing maturity in faith through regular prayer, worship, devotions, service, giving, and sharing our faith with others. Those aren't the only marks of discipleship. We participate in God's continuing activity in our intentional regard for the sacredness as we...

- > offer hospitality
- > show forgiveness
- > seek peace and justice
- > tend and care for creation
- regard silence and stillness
- > speak up for those unable to speak for themselves
- > honor Sabbath
- > offer mercy and understanding
- > respect our bodies
- > treat all people with dignity and respect
- > cope with grief and despair, stress and worry
- > respect relationships whether budding or breaking
- > and the way we regard death and dying

BY SHOWING GRATITUDE. My friend uses her Facebook page to post 365 blessings-a daily picture, name, quote, or situation for which she gives God thanks. Another friend asks her confirmation class to give thanks for one thing that happened during the week and to seek God's care for a worrisome situation they are facing. Many of the young people comment that this simple exercise helps them express their faith to one another in a simple, meaningful, and comfortable manner. It is so easy for us to complain or sink to bitterness and apathy. Yet God is faithful, gives abundantly, and always provides for us in sufficient measure.

BY ACTIVELY LISTENING AND PARTIC-IPATING IN CARING CONVERSATIONS.

So often we overlook the treasure we mutually enjoy when we truly listen and share our faith with our family, friends, colleagues, and even casual acquaintances. We reveal our basic posture toward life when our fears, our source of trust and strength, our dreams, and our hopes are communicated in stories and conversation. Life is a constant ebb and flow of losses

and new beginnings. Often without realizing it, we articulate our own personal life panorama. We confront turning points, critique decisions, explore paths to renewal, galvanize our identity and sense of belonging, and uncover spirit-driven truths. It is through conversation and story surrounding these events that is at the core of what it means to be a Christian family or community. God yearns for us to be in community. Indeed, the Incarnation is the ultimate reflection of God's desire for us to love and care for one another.

TELL AND RETELL THE STORY

God is a welcoming storyteller—always inviting us into the story and generously making way for God's story to be ours. This wonderful news is meant for *everyone* and we have a role in widening the circle. Let's all add witness-bearer to our resumes. As leaders, teachers, parents, neighbors, and citizens of the world, we have a joy-filled privilege and awesome responsibility to fling wide the door and invite others to know Christ as we do.

One way we do that is by first sharing our own

PRAY FOR:

- 1. THE OPPORTUNITY TO COME
 YOUR WAY
 (that God will open to us a
 door for the word).
- 2. AN OPEN RECEPTION FROM THE OTHER PERSON (that we may declare the mystery of Christ).
- 3. CLARITY AND CONFIDENCE
 THAT YOUR WORDS WILL
 RESOUND WITH SINCERITY
 (so that I may reveal it
 clearly, as I should).

faith...yes, by witnessing. Ouch! If the thought of witnessing makes you feel uncomfortable or inadequate, just consider yourself an eye-witness. Begin by simply telling where you see Christ's presence at that moment. Make it a habit to notice and speak these thoughts. It's exciting to imagine how our casual comments will be used by the Holy Spirit to stir the hearts of others. We dwell in the midst of a wonderful love story experienced daily as we encounter a God who loves us so deeply that nothing can separate us from that love. We need to let it be mirrored in our thoughts, words, and actions so

others, too, come to know that love.

Sometimes it is not easy to share our faith with others. It may feel uncomfortable or even pushy so we just ignore the opportunity God has placed before us. When you find yourself reluctant, use Paul's advice to the Colossians as your personal three-part prayer to jump start a bold and confident invitation, beckoning others to a relationship with Christ:

"At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, . . . so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should" (Colossians 4:3-4).

Diane Monroe is former ELCA director for Christian education.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- > ELCA Ministry in Daily Life (http://tinyurl.com/ELCAministry)
- > Vocation and Ministry in Daily Life, a blog on Living Lutheran (http://tinyurl.com/Everist) by Norma Cook Everist
- Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families-Living the Faith in Daily Life, Diana Garland, Jossey-Bass.
- > "Lessons for Today's Disciples," www.womenoftheelca.org



LET US PRAY

Seeing Through a Mirror Dimly

by Julie K. Aageson

What do you see when you look through a big picture window?

"Ah," you say, "the mountains are majestic. Look! An early snowfall has dusted the tops. See how they glisten in the winter sunlight?" You are describing the view beyond the window, giving no thought at all to the actual window glass right in front of your eyes! The function of the window is to look through it. Its transparency allows you to see not the window glass itself but what lies beyond it.

German theologian Paul Tillich liked to speak of faith as a window, a lens for looking at the world, for seeing beyond the window. He challenged students to consider the Bible, prayer, even Jesus as windows. He warned against making the window, the glass-whether Scripture, prayer, or our own tradition-the objects of our devotion.

I don't know about you, but especially in matters of faith, I often see through a mirror-even a windowdimly. When I read Scripture or listen to the weekly texts, when I struggle with the daily challenges of life, when I pray, layers of church grime and layers of my own grime sometimes get in the way.

I like clean windows. But I also appreciate a compelling and dynamic faith that struggles to see through windows that aren't always clear. I'm wary of nicely turned descriptions about who Jesus was, who God is. I'm uneasy about certitude and a Christian corner on the truth. I like to think that God is bigger than our creeds and confessions and attempts at definitive answers.

Another Paul, the apostle, wrote comforting words in 1 Corinthians: "For now we see in a mirror dimly...now I know only in part." This Paul too is a window, another lens for helping us see God through Jesus. He too wrestles with questions and uncertainties. He too invites us to see the world through the eyes of Christ. Like Jesus, he too had a way of telling stories and looking at the world that always pointed beyond himself to God.

Windows are sometimes smudged. That's part of the dynamism and mystery of faith and to my mind, that's part of what makes it so compelling. I like living with questions of faith. Even so, the windows provide a view of the world that makes sense to me. As dark and dim as they sometimes can be, through them I see a life-giving, generous God.

Through windows, the ordinary things of life-daily routine, family relationships, unexpected illness and loss, the steady beat of world events, the cycles of nature, our own self-absorption-are transformed into something more than ordinary. Through windows, each of these things become vessels for showing us God's overwhelming love and grace, helping us bear everyday witness to the workings of God.

In this season of gratitude and thanksgiving, may this be especially true for each of you!

Julie K. Aageson is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.



HEALTH WISE

Bacterial World

by Molly M. Ginty

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

They're tiny: invisible

to the naked eye. They're simple: just single-celled organisms. But bacteria called "superbugs" are far from innocuous. Forming pairs, strands, and clusters, they multiply rapid-fire, spreading illness—and killing 100,000 Americans per year.

"More and more germs are becoming superbugs because they're developing a resistance to antibiotics," says Vance Fowler, M.D., an epidemiologist at Duke University, in Durham, N.C. "But the good news is that there are effective steps you can take to protect yourself." During "Get Smart About Antibiotics Week" (November 14–20), here's how.

How much damage can a simple germ wreak? Consider the destruction caused by methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), so named because even one of the strongest antibiotics (methicillin) is unable to kill it off. MRSA, a more potent version of the regular Staphylococcus or staph bacteria, can penetrate the skin through a cut and then trigger infection that turns a minor wound into an oozing sore. As it progresses, MRSA can cause fever, rashes, and damage to the bones, muscles, and internal organs. It can even lead to necrotizing fasciitis, in which bacteria literally eat away at human flesh.

Once the scourge of hospitals, MRSA has in recent decades started spreading among athletes, schoolchildren, and members of the military—all at high risk of infection because they share such close quarters. This superbug is now car-

ried by 1 percent of Americans, 90,000 of whom get sick from it and 19,000 of whom die from it each year.

Reports of MRSA's spread show babies are catching it when they are delivered by C-section—and that their mothers are subsequently contracting it through breastfeeding. "People sick with cancer are getting it during IV chemo treatments, and healthy people are picking it up at the gym," says Jeanine Thomas, founder of the MRSA Survivors Network. MRSA has even been found on bedbugs and in tattoo parlors—defeating landlords' and health authorities' vigilant attempts to stamp it out.

How did we get to the point where a bug like MRSA can outsmart modern medicine? Since penicillin, the first antibiotic, was introduced in 1944, people have overused antibiotics, taking them in cases where they aren't necessary. Antibiotics are even routinely administered to livestock. Indeed, reports the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 50 percent of antibiotic use is totally unnecessary.

As old antibiotics have become overused—and as the development of new ones has slowed—some superbugs have evolved so they have tougher cell membranes that won't let antibiotics in, or tiny pumps in their cells that push antibiotics out. There has been a surge in potentially lethal bacteria such as MRSA and vancomycin-resistant *Enterococcus faecium* (VRE). Scientists are discovering bacterial enzymes such as *Klebsiella pneumo*niae carbapenemases (KPCs, which make bacteria resist antibiotics called carbapenems). Researchers have even found mutations that make bacteria cesistant to most known drugs.

Scared of virulent superbugs? So are health authorities, who have ramped up efforts to fight these germs-and whose work is now starting to pay off. A 2010 study n the Journal of the American Medial Association found MRSA infec-

tion rates in major hospitals have dropped 28 percent over the course of four years. And a 2011 study in the New England Journal of Medicine found infection rates in intensive care units were down 62 percent. Several pharmaceutical companies are developing vaccines for staph bacteria, while the National Institutes of Health is funding extensive studies of newer pathogens.

bacteria.

As science scrambles to catch up to superbugs, what can you do to stay safe? Look at the six sure-fire tips (below) from epidemiologists who are on the front lines of battling these bugs. Ju

Molly M. Ginty (http://mollymaureenginty. wordpress.com) lives in New York City. Her work has appeared in Women's eNews, Marie Claire, Redbook, and Ms.

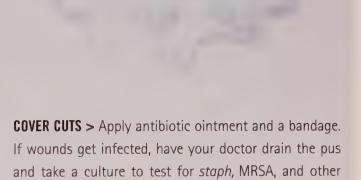
SIX ANTI-BACTERIAL TIPS

SCRUB UP > Your best defense against superbugs is one of the simplest strategies: washing your hands in warm, soapy water for a full 15 seconds whenever they are dirty, and using hand sanitizer with 60 percent alcohol when washing isn't possible.

LAUNDER OFTEN > Wash gym and athletic clothes after each use. When you have cuts or abrasions, launder towels and sheets in hot water and use bleach to kill stubborn germs.

USE ANTIBIOTICS WISELY > Don't take antibiotics for viruses such as the flu, which they can't fight. If your doctor gives you antibiotics for other reasons, ask for newer varieties (which are more effective against superbugs) and shun "broad-spectrum" ones (which kill good bacteria along with the bad). Take all the antibiotic pills prescribed so dangerous germs don't keep living in your body—and bouncing back stronger than before.

KEEP IT PERSONAL > Don't share towels, sheets, razors, clothing, or athletic equipment. Note that bar soap can transmit bacteria, and that liquid, bottled soap is safer.



SAFEGUARD YOUR HEALTH CARE > "If you see a doctor or land in the hospital, make sure health care providers and visitors wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before touching you," says Steven Gordon, M.D., president of the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America. Also make sure that staff wipe stethoscopes and other equipment with alcohol-and insert intravenous tubes and catheters under sterile conditions.



"In the night in which he was betrayed..."

What is a person supposed to do when faced with the storms of life? Evidently, from Jesus' reaction to his disciples in the boat, the appropriate response is not doubt and panic. But fear is the natural reaction, isn't it?

Maybe you, like the disciples, have experienced the destructive power of nature firsthand. The news is full of stories about tornados and flooding, wildfires and tsunamis. A person's very survival can depend on knowing what kind of storm is coming. A flood? Head for higher ground. A tornado? Down to the basement as quickly as possible.

For the kind of storm our insurance carriers like to call "an act of nature" there is little we can do as human beings except prepare, watch, and pray. Unlike Jesus, we do not have the ability to make the wind and waves obey us.

But not all storms are physical. Often more difficult are the spiritual storms that loom on a person's horizon. How do we ride out the storms of life—temporal or spiritual? Perhaps the first question for a disciple ought to be "How did my master handle these situations?"

"In the night in which he was betrayed..." The greatest storm Jesus ever faced was during the time we now refer to as Holy Week, particularly Thursday evening. He knew Judas was going to betray him. He knew that he would be handed over to his enemies and crucified. What greater storm could a person face?

There are some quickly uttered words during the Eucharist that strike me as wondrous no matter how many times I hear them: "In the night in which he was betrayed..." These are words that

can be easily overlooked. They may even go unheard. The phrase can be dismissed as mere prologue to the real story, the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the wine. But if you were not familiar with our Eucharistic ritual, what words might naturally follow?

"In the night in which he was betrayed...

... Jesus sought a hiding place from the authorities."

... Jesus left Jerusalem so he could visit Nazareth one last time."

... Jesus stayed in his room, reading the scriptures."

But no. "In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus tooks bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples..."

On the very night in which he was betrayed, Jesus observed a sacred ritual meal with his disciples. He didn't change his routine, but continued to worship God with the Seder, just as he had at every other Passover. He began by giving thanks to God and then shared what he had with his friends. When the meal was over, he took his three best friends for comfort and support and went out to pray. Jesus faced his greatest storm with the same spiritual practices he had culivated throughout his life: worship, gratitude, prayer, generosity.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Consider the piano student. There s a reason that pianists practice scales, even after long years of study. For serious students of the piano, scales are a daily discipline, their warm-up before beginning rehearsal. The discipline of running scales keeps the fingers agile and instills correct fingering patterns in a person's muscle memory. The cales themselves are not works of irt but they provide the foundation on which great musical art can be composed and performed. Only when the scales become second nature can the pianist advance to narder techniques.

Like the pianist's scales, spirilual disciplines are the foundations of our lives, and they are referred to often as spiritual practices for good eason. It truly does take practice or one to become skilled in the piritual disciplines. This isn't a juestion of mastering these practices. No one ever masters a spiritual discipline. Rather it's as matter of allowing yourself to be transformed through the consistent practicing of them.

In his now-classic book Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster divides the historic Christian spiritual disciplines as follows:

The Inward Disciplines

Meditation

Prayer

Fasting

Study

The Outward Disciplines

Simplicity

Solitude

Submission

Service

The Corporate Disciplines

Confession

Worship

Guidance

Celebration

Foster uses two different metaphors to illustrate the disciplines: a path and a field.

According to Foster, the spiritual disciplines are "a means of receiving God's grace [that] allow us to place ourselves before God so he can transform us." Foster likens the spiritual disciplines to a narrow mountain path with drop-offs on either side. Fall one way and you are lost to trusting in your own good works. Fall the other way and you are lost to living a faith without deeds. But if you stay on the path of spiritual discipline you live in relationship with God and remain open to the future God envisions for you.

In the same way, the spiritual disciplines are like the farmer's field. The farmer cannot grow a crop. All the farmer can do is prepare the soil, plant the seed, water, and weed. It is nature itself that causes the crop to flourish and produce grain. Likewise the spiritual disciplines are our way of preparing ourselves for what the Holy Spirit will bring to maturity.

WHAT JESUS DID

Scripture makes it clear that Jesus observed many spiritual practices. Time and again we're told that he would steal away by himself to pray (Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16). It was clear from his teaching in the synagogue that he was well-versed in the Torah, "... for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:29). Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness, although his disciples did not fast. When the people asked him about this, Jesus' explanation clearly implies that fasting ought to be part of our contemporary spiritual disciplines. (Mark 2:18–20) Despite centuries of observance, Christian spiritual disciplines are viewed warily by those who fear observers may lapse into superstition or "works righteousness." There is nothing magical about spiritual practices. You will not score points with God by reading Scripture or by attending worship or by fasting. Nor will you lose points with God if you do not take advantage of what the spiritual disciplines have to offer.

The practice of the disciplines must always be accompanied by the certain understanding that salvation comes as a gift, a product of God's grace. However, if you put these disciplines into regular practice you will turn to them naturally when a crisis arises. You are more likely to have the spiritual fortitude you need to weather the storm. And you will have one more critical advantage.

Early in my working life I was a general assignment reporter in a television newsroom. The woman who covered the crime beat made one stop every morning on her way into work. She would drop by the "cop shop" (that is, local police station) and check in with the officer on duty. She had no agenda, no investigative angle she was working. She was just getting to know people, asking about their lives and their work.

She knew every cop on the force, if not by name at least by sight. They all knew her as well and over time the trust level between

them grew. When the day came that a major crime story broke, who do you think the police officers on the scene were willing to talk to?

In journalism terms this reporter was "cultivating her sources." In normal parlance we call it "building relationships." And this is exactly what we're doing with God when we practice the spiritual disciplineswe're building a strong, trusting relationship over time. Now this doesn't mean that people who lack a long history of practicing the spiritual disciplines are somehow unable to be in relationship with God. Jesus made that clear on the cross when he promised the thief that "today you will be with me in paradise." But faithful attentiveness to one's relationship with God will pay great dividends when the inevitable storms of life arise.

FAIR WEATHER OR FOUL

Is this a fair-weather season in your life? There's no better time for the deliberate practice of the spiritual disciplines. You can even be thankful for the minor squalls that pop up every now and then, since they give you concrete opportunities to put your spiritual strength to the test. The steady observance of spiritual practices over time will give you the confidence you need to lean on your relationship with God, trusting that it won't fail you when you need it most.

Perhaps you don't have the luxury of calm seas right now. Maybe, like the disciples, you are crying out to God, "Do you not care that I am perishing?" Does it seem as though God is asleep in the boat? That your pleas are met with deafening silence? Take comfort in knowing that Jesus has already traveled this road ahead of you: "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?"

Now more than ever, the spiritual disciplines can bring you solace. Spend time in study, especially with the psalms of lament. Use those psalms as your prayer when you have no words of your own. Practice the deep breathing exercises of meditation.

Try to find ways to be in service to others. Stay open to the new possibilities that the Holy Spirit may have in store for you. Attend worship, allowing the rest of the body of Christ to uphold you with love and comfort. And when the time comes for the Eucharist, listen closely:

"In the night in which he was a betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his a disciples saying, 'Take and eat. This is my body that is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'"

Susan Greeley lives in Oak Park, Ill., and worships at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. She works as the director of development for the annual fund of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois.





Lutheran World Relief



FAMILY MATTERS

What's A Big Deal?

by Sue Gamelin

Our daughter Molli

has a whimsical sense of humor. I love visiting the home that she and her husband, Matt, and my two grand-dogs share. It's full of special touches that delight the eye and mind.

Among the things on display is an 8x10 photo from Molli's preschool days. It was Picture Day at Lads and Lasses Preschool. Two rows of 4-year-olds are painstakingly arranged around Miss Judy. The boys have tucked their best shirts into new slacks, and the girls sit proudly in their pink and yellow dresses.

All the girls except Molli. There she is, right in the middle, happily wearing her American Indian dress. It's tan, decorated with fringe and beads. On her blond curls sits a headband with a feather.

I can remember trying to talk Molli into wearing one of her fancy dresses for picture day. After all, what would the other moms think of me for dressing her that way? But she was absolutely certain about what she was going to wear. You know, 4-year-olds can be remarkably determined. I also remember deciding that it was going to be important to pick my battles with Molli. There would be battles ahead over things that were really important, certainly more important than what to wear on picture day. Definitely more important than what the other moms thought of me.

My friend Weez was reminiscing with me about the decisions she'd made as a young mom. Like me she let her daughters pick out their own clothes, even if that meant they had some really *interest*- ing outfits on as they headed off to school. But Weez is blind. She guessed that the other moms and teachers might have been thinking, "Those poor girls with a blind mom who can't even dress them properly." Little did they know that those lucky girls had a mom who had decided to choose her battles and save her influence for what really matters.

I wonder what battles Mary and Joseph picked while Jesus and his brothers and sisters were growing up. The only biblical story of the boy Jesus is one that makes our hearts stop when we think about it. It's from Luke 2:41-51. Jesus is 12, and is on a special trip with a group of his family. It's their annual trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. You know what happens. When the group sets off for home at the festival's end, Jesus stays behind in Jerusalem. He wants have time with the teachers in the temple, listening to them and asking questions. The result? "All who heard [[esus] were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (v. 47).

But amazement is not Mary and Joseph's prevailing emotion. When they discover that he is missing, they search frantically for him. We can only imagine how their anxiety increased as three days of looking passed.

When they found him they did what my mother did when my "missing" 5-year-old sister was found asleep in the back corner of the bottom bunk, covered with her favorite blanket. Mary cries out: "Child, why have you treated us like this?"

This was a big deal. It is the responsibility of parents to keep heir children safe. It is the responsibility of children to honor their parents. Even though Jesus knew that ne was called to be in the temple, is "Father's house," he learned that ne needed to be obedient to his parents when his safety was involved.

That was a big deal. Clearly.

But other instances aren't so lear, not when we are raising children or shepherding grandchildren or caring for nieces and nephews. Which battles do we pick? How do ve decide what is worth fighting over when the children in our care want to do things, buy things, go laces we hadn't planned on? What bout amazing hair colors? Driving? Time allowed on the Internet, tweetng, texting? Curfews? What do we et go, and when do we put our feet lown? How can we raise kids that ve can trust to make decisions that on't put themselves at risk?

Aha! There it is. We may not gree with each other's decisions bout which battles are worth fightng. But I'm confident that safety the bottom line for all of us. We vant to raise children who know ow to make decisions that keep nem as safe as possible. And we vant to do the best job we can f raising them for that outcome. astead of shouting, "You'll break our leg if you don't come down nis minute!" we want to work with our children so that they can assess the levels of danger before they're in that leg-breaking situation.

Dangers there are. Leg-breaking seems to be a pretty mild one-I'm a broken-leg survivor, so I can say this-when we put it along side the statistics that the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMCE) states on its Web site, www.missingkids.com. One in seven youth between 10 and 17 receive a sexual solicitation or approach over the Internet. Some 2,185 children are reported missing each day. One in five girls, one in 10 boys are victimized before adulthood. There are extremely helpful guides for parents and guardians that NCMCE provides on its Web site with the goal of keeping children safer. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (www.fda.gov) not only offers statistics about teens and drug abuse, but also gives us the gift of the "The Anti-Drug Site for Parents." On its Web site, www.cdc.gov, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention startles us with the news that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens, and it offers us tools for keeping young drivers and passengers safe.

The dangers are out there.

We want the young ones we love to stay firmly within the circle of our love and our protection.

What can we do? With each question about clothes and curfews,

texting and tattoos, let's measure the need for our kids to be safe alongside the deep concern we have to keep them within the circle of our particular protection. Let's enfold them in our arms as tenderly as Jesus did the children brought to him. Let's teach them as clearly as Jesus taught us. Then let's set them as free as the birds that God loves.

But that's not all. Let's pray for their safety and healing as fervently as Jesus raised Jairus' daughter (Mark 5: 21–24) and rebuked the demon that threw a boy into a fire (Mark 9: 20–23). Let's welcome them back from their wanderings as passionately as did the loving father in the parable of the prodigal and his brother.

When I was waiting at an airport for one of my college-age kids to come home after a summer living with friends in the woods in Washington state, I suddenly wondered if I would recognize my daughter. What color would her hair be? Would she have hair? New tattoos? I did recognize her. The tired and sweaty young woman with pale lavender hair who stepped off the airplane in torn up jeans was definitely mine. My smile and hugs couldn't have been bigger. Hers either.

The Nev See Gamelin is a retired ELCA nuller some in horth Carolina. She and her Introduct time have the grown on lidren and



When We Gather

by Gwen Sayler

Every fall without fail, six women from all over the United States gather in Valparaiso, Ind., for two days of retreat, refreshment, and renewal. We are the Valpo University Lutheran Deaconess Class of '71, a group of college classmates whose ties have deepened and born much fruit over the 40 years that we have known each other. None of us would be the woman she is without the ongoing nurture and accountability of this group; none of us can envision life without the generative sustenance we gain from each other in our annual gatherings.

The general routine of these gatherings has

remained remarkably consistent over the years. Thanks to a friend's generosity in annually vacating her condominium for us, we have a set location in which to meet. We know who is bringing what and how to arrange the food and drink supplies as they arrive. We know how to position the chairs and where to sit.

Once seated, we begin our marathon of non-stop conversation punctuated by food breaks every 45 minutes with ample snacking in between. While this general routine has remained consistent over the years, some things have changed. We used to sit up talking half the night, but now we begin to fade by 9 P.M. In our younger years, we

ised to gregariously gallop right in with updates about children and birth control decisions, moving from there o health (body parts) issues, then to vocational opportunities, and finally to the problems of the world. Now, nour pre-retirement years, we gingerly limp right in to body parts issues (of which our knowledge has greatly noreased as we discover more and more parts we did not even know existed until they quit working properly), moving from there to grandchildren, declining parents, adult children, retirement dreams, and then on the problems of the world.

ONE MORE TIME

We have not always realized and appreciated the importance of these annual gatherings. As young deaconesses with the future wide open before us, we felt no need to gather—simply seeing each other at the annual conferences of the whole deaconess community was enough. Gradually, however, as parents began to die and as our lives got more complicated, we began gathering together for our own retreat every other year.

Then we received a phone call that none of us wanted to hear. Our beloved sister Eleanor, the Canadian in our midst, was dying of cancer and had only



From left: Judy Hoshek, Jan Janzow, Gwen Sayler, Anita Mohr, Karen Melang, Vanette Kashmer

days or weeks to live. We could not allow Eleanor to die without gathering around her one more time. Pooling our financial resources and taking emergency time off work, we flew or drove to Toronto from Colorado, Nebraska, Iowa, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Ohio to be with Eleanor and to share our love with her one more time.

The hours we spent gathered around her bed are moments we will treasure forever. We laughed and cried and sang hymns and got to say our final good-byes to the sister whose memory we will always

cherish. Eleanor died a few weeks after our visit. One of her final requests was that we return to Toronto to preside at her memorial service. We did so, gathering in Canada one more time to commend Eleanor to our Lord confident that she now is gathered into the company of all the saints in light.

After Eleanor died, realizing that there will not always be another "next year" for all of us to gather, we switched to the annual gathering schedule we now follow. Over these 40-plus years, it has been a long and glorious ride. In the bonds created and sustained in our on-going conversations, we've struggled and rejoiced together through relationships, marriages, divorces, children's births and now their adult lives, parents' declines and deaths, vocational changes, menopause, and now impending retirements. Over the years, we have come to know each other intimately with all our gifts and all our warts and blemishes as well. We love each other, are accountable to each other, and are confident that we will be there for each other as long as God graciously gives us breath.

But there is more. When we gather, we are part, in God's own wondrously mysterious way, of gatherings much greater than us. When we gather, Eleanor is with us in memory and spirit—probably chuckling at our foibles as she did in life. When we gather, we summon present the deaconesses who have gone before us whose lives have meant so much to us. They too gather with us in memory and in spirit. When we gather, the Risen Christ is present in our midst, binding us together with the whole body of Christ throughout time and space, sending us back into our daily lives refreshed and renewed for service in Christ's name.

THANKSGIVING

Think for a moment of the groups in which you gather. In this month of November, many of us anticipate Thanksgiving as a time when our extended family gathers to seek the Lord's blessing and share a tradi-

tional meal. General routines of these family gatherings tend to remain remarkably consistent—who brings what, how the table is set, who sits where, in what order family stories are told and re-told and updates given on family members and their activities. Throughout the meal, relationships are renewed and refreshed; family members now with the Lord are remembered fondly; children are integrated into the larger family of which they are a part.

Over the years, locations and topics of conversation change as life situations change; traditional routines, nonetheless, tend to remain remarkably consistent. As children we may not have always realized and appreciated the importance of these gatherings. As we have grown and matured, however, we see more and more clearly the importance of gathering to strengthen the family; calling present family members who have gone before us, nurturing in our children an awareness of who they are and of the legacy they will pass on to their children after them.

Many of us anticipate these family Thanksgiving gatherings with the kind of fervor with which the Class of '71 anticipates its annual retreats. For those of us who live far from families or don't have healthy families or who grieve deeply the death of loved ones, however, Thanksgiving can be a time of emptiness and loneliness. In these times, it is crucial that we remember and hold fast to the promise that in our baptisms we were gathered into the body of Christ, the family of God's people extending throughout time and space. Gathered into this family, we can rest confident that we are loved and are not alone, that we are treasured and valued despite the pain and loneliness that may fill our hearts especially in those times when the rest of the world seems all gathered together in joyous family reunions.

ALL SAINTS DAY

There is yet another gathering in which we all are privileged to participate each November. On the first Sunday of the month, we gather in our individual congregations to celebrate All Saints Day, the worshipful calling present of the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us and yet remain with us still.

Although each congregation has its own unique vay of celebrating All Saints Day, much of the routine remains remarkably consistent throughout the church. The liturgical color is white. Bells toll or hand bells ing as the names of those in the congregation who have died in the past year are read. Prayers are prayed, essons read, sermons preached. Hymns are sung, ypically including "For All the Saints," and often with prass accompaniment. In most congregations, Holy Communion is celebrated.

Whatever the routines of our worship, on this day he whole church gathers to call present the saints who rave gone before us, to remember those whose deaths ve mourn, to re-commit ourselves to carrying on faithrully as the saints who have gone before us.

What was, what is, and what will be come together s we gather around the altar to share the meal of life, he body and blood of our Lord Jesus for us and for he world. We are named and claimed and held fast in oving arms that will never let us go; we are included nd sustained in the body of Christ throughout time nd space.

I would guess that as the years pass, many of us ome to appreciate All Saints Day worship more and nore. In youth, life seems to stretch out forever and athering together is something that can be put on hold ndefinitely. But as loved ones die and our own lives ecome more complicated, the limited time with which ve are graced on earth becomes more precious and ne meaning of gathering within the cloud of witnesses nore important. We gather as part of God's gracious, iteractive chain linking together past, present, and tture confident in God's promise that nothing can eparate God's people in every time from God's love n Jesus Christ our Lord.

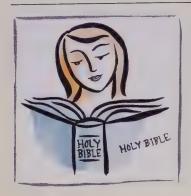
THIS MAGAZINE

The new title of this journal—*Gather*—captures well the wondrous yet mysterious bonding that God works in and through us in our various kinds of gathering. Many readers of this magazine have gathered over the years to participate in Bible studies and to be sustained and further equipped for service in daily life.

As the community gathers to ask the Lord's blessing in Thanksgiving worship, so in our individual readings of the magazine and in our Bible study groups we gather with each other across the many spatial distances that separate us. But there is more. In God's delightfully mysterious way, our gatherings are part of that larger gathering that knows no bounds. When we gather for study, prayer, and conversation, we call present the generations of women who have gathered before us, leaving us the legacy we will pass on to those who follow us.

Over the centuries, much has changed. One thing the crucial thing-remains and will remain the same. The Risen Christ is in our midst, nurturing and sustaining us, energizing and equipping us for service, binding us together within the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us and will come after us.

And so we gather. We gather in our joys and sorrows, our triumphs and tragedies, trusting that we are loved and accepted and part of the larger gathering of all God's faithful people. We gather in anticipation of the great day when, as the beloved hymn "Shall We Gather at the River?" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 423) so eloquently expresses it, we shall be gathered together at the river of life with all the saints of every time and place to partake in the joyful feast that will know no end. Gathering-what a gift our Lord has graciously granted us. Gathering-what privilege and a joy is given us. What can we say but "gather on"! The Rev. Gwen Sayler is professor of Bible at Wartburg Theological Seminary. This article was written with the copious assistance of



BIBLE STUDY

Theme Verse

"He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

Mark 4:40

POWER AND AUTHORITY

by Patricia Lull

Opening

Hymn "Lord, Let my Heart Be Good Soil" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 512)

Prayer

Holy God, be in our study and our learning. Fill us with understanding and fruitful living, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Introduction to Mark 4:1-6:29

Their faces and the sound of their voices come back to me even now. Though it was decades ago that I attended Sunday school and vacation Bible school in the church of my child-hood, I still carry with me the lessons learned in those days and the dear memory of those who taught me. Most were women whose training consisted of living the Christian faith year after year. I'm not sure I ever thanked them at the time, but I thank God now for their witness. (See "When We Gather," p. 22.)

In this session we travel with Jesus as he moves through the region of Galilee, teaching as he goes. Some of the lessons occur as people gather in the synagogue, but much of Jesus' teaching takes place while he is on the move—healing the people he encounters and instructing the disciples.

In these passages, Mark shows us, again at breakneck speed, that Jesus is one who has power and authority. His is the power to calm a stormy sea and the power to restore people to wholeness of life. He has God's authority to forgive sins and to send out others, empowering them to bring the good news.

Teaching with Parables READ MARK 4:1-9.

Jesus is in a boat, tethered at the edge of the shoreline. He sits rather than stands to teach, as a rabbi would in those days. Rather than lecture notes, he uses parables, or simple teaching stories, to make his points. (See "The Power of Parables," p. 32.)

Jesus sets the scene with a well-known parable employing agricultural images. In his pre-mechanical age, fields were planted by scattering seed by hand. Yet, the imagery also provokes reflection on the lives of those hearing Mark's Gospel. Into which category do our own lives fall—the seeds devoured by birds the young shoots too shallowly roots.

d to thrive, the plants choked out by distractions, r those who flourish with deep and well-nourished oots? You may want to highlight verse 8 and watch for where it reappears in Mark.

Notice the simple rhythm and repetition in these erses. The chart below will help you see the structure nat supports this parable. (You can fill in the final colmn after reading Mark 4:13–20.)

When Jesus says, "Let anyone with ears to hear lisen!" (4:9), he is referring to a life-changing understandng of the message he brings. In fact, in the original inguage this verse reads, "He who has ears to hear let im hear." You might also read Isaiah 28:23 and Jermiah 5:21 to glimpse the resonance this verse has with ne message of the prophets, whose witness prepares ne way for the coming of Jesus of Nazareth.

In 4:9 Jesus is talking about more than just paying ttention. This parable describes the kind of life the isciples are called to lead. Jesus often ends a parable with this invitation to follow the way of life he offers. See "This Is My Story," p. 10.)

Can you remember when you first heard this parable? Which images can you picture with your eyes closed? What do those memories and strong images show about the persuasive power of parables?

Inside the Parables READ MARK 4:10-20.

The disciples rejoin the story and speak the question that is on the mind of those in the crowd by the shore and in our own minds as hearers today. "What does this mean?" In addition, the disciples also wonder "Why doesn't everyone get this?"

The word secret in 4:11 is musterion in the Greek. Musterion (or mystery) means a revelation or something that is not obvious on the surface but needs to be revealed. In Mark's Gospel such secrets concern God's plans, which are revealed to those who follow Jesus as disciples. There are "insiders" and "outsiders" when it comes to understanding who Jesus is as well as comprehending the lessons he teaches.

Look now at Isaiah 6:9-10, the Old Testament passage quoted in 4:12. From the beginning, human beings have wrestled with matters of faith and understanding. Not everyone catches on today; nor did everyone who met Jesus, even face-to-face, recognize that it was actually God who stood in their midst. Mark makes clear that this is God's way of appearing in Jesus. In fact, the God we meet elsewhere in the Bible often comes among people, coaxing and inviting them into faith rather than overwhelming them with an unmistakable divine presence.

BIBLICAL TEXT	IMAGE IN THE PARABLE	CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES	ALLEGORICAL MEANING (MARK 4:13-20)
Mark 4:3-4			
Mark 4:5-6			
Mark 4:7			
Mark 4:8			

Jesus interprets this parable as an allegory in which each image reflects the experience of a different kind of believer or non-believer. He knows that his hearers will be drawn to wonder which kind of soil—which kind of believer—they are.

2. Can you name a time in your life when the word of God spoke so compellingly to you that your response was clear and strong? Or does God often deal with you more subtly, with hints and nudges that you only later understand? Why are some seasons in our lives so fertile and others more like the rocky soil or the thorny patch?

In The Boat with Jesus READ MARK 4:35-41.

As I child, I was taught to watch the sky for storm clouds. A band of rising, dark cumulus clouds on the western horizon could quickly turn into a summer thunderstorm or signal the onset of threatening winds. It was impor-

tant to know the signs that said "head home now."

If Time Permits: More Teachings
READ MARK 4:21–34.

This series of parables was likely spoken by Jesus over a period of time. By placing them together Mark builds momentum, focusing our attention on this "kingdom of God," which is a way of describing the world from God's perspective and intervening presence. As early as Mark 1:14–15 we were told that announcing the nearness of the kingdom of God is at the heart of Jesus' message of good news.

Remember that the Roman Empire was the powerful "kingdom" in that time and place. But Jesus invites his hearer's to follow "the Jesus way" rather than "Caesar's way." His divinely ordained kingdom stands in contrast to the many competing forms of power and empire even today.

3. Working together, can you come up with a contemporary parable? That is, have you ever noticed an event or an exchange between people that revealed the grace and generosity of God? (See "A Modern-Day Parable," p. 5.)

This was even more crucial for those who fished or traveled by boat on the Sea of Galilee. Surrounded by hills and often beset by rapidly changing weather patterns, the calmest sailing weather could quickly turn into a life-threatening storm. That is the backdrop for this pivotal story.

Imagine how exhausting the work of teaching the crowds had been for Jesus. It is no surprise that he falls asleep in the boat. Pause to picture Jesus as he sleeps, noticing that Mark includes the delightful detail that his head rested on a pillow or cushion.

As the storm strikes, the disciples speak for all of us when they awaken Jesus and ask, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (4:38). Look at the palmist's cry in Psalm 42 or Psalm 46:1–3 to grasp the universality of this concern.

This time Jesus teaches by his direct command to the wind and the waves. He orders the wind and waves to "quiet down." He demonstrates that he cares by revealing his power over the forces of creation. (See "Riding

Out the Storm," p. 16.)

Once the boat is no longer rocking on the waves, Jesus presses the disciples about their understanding of him. Would Jesus really not care that they were dying? Does not Jesus have the power to rescue them from every threat and harm? As so often happens in Mark's Gospel, Jesus is a step ahead of these disciples who do not yet fully understand who he really is. Like us, they are still learned ing as they go.

Notice the question from the backseat. "Who is this?" (Mark 4:41) Though they have been following Jesus, hearing him teach, watching him heal, and receiving special instruction from him they still have

nuch to learn about who Jesus really is. Could he eally be so close to them and also so at-one with the Creator of all things?

This Gospel account opens up our own sense of vonder about Jesus. What does it mean that the wind

and the waves obey his command? Who but God alone has such power? Use this text and listen to one another reflect on those times when fears have been calmed by God's presence.

If Time Permits: On the Far Shore **READ MARK 5:1-20.**

Jesus' ministry now extends to territory further and further from his home base in Capernaum. He is now in territory that is dominated by non-Jews.

The man at the center of this story has been driven into isolation because of his bizarre and violent behavior. He is no longer able to live among others but seeks shelter in the tombs of the dead.

Like others possessed by demons (Mark 1:23 and 3:11), this man readily perceives who Jesus really is. He addresses him, shouting, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God" (5:7). This title is steeped in a confession of faith even if it comes out of the man's mouth sounding like a plea for Jesus to go away: "What have you to do with me?" This terribly troubled person gets who Jesus is.

Remember the curious thing Jesus said about himself in Mark 3:27? Jesus unbinds the tormented man and places the demons under a quarantine that squelches their power. Here is an example of the "strong man," the Evil One, being overcome.

Iesus and the man called Legion engage in an extended negotiation. The word legion is a military term, meaning 6,000 or more soldiers. Swine are not kosher animals and would not have been kept by Jews, adding to the intrigue of this text. It is not long before the Gentile swineherds get involved. The frenzy that ensues with the pigs rushing into the lake, and their keepers running for help in this drama contributes to its power as a teaching story.

This, too, is a story of discipleship. The man once so tormented-and presumably a Gentile-begs to come along with Jesus. Jesus refuses, not because he wants to be rid of this man but because Jesus senses that this man's real work will be here among his neighbors in this non-Jewish region east of the Sea of Galilee.

The Work Continues

READ MARK 5:21-24A, 35-43.

After the commotion on the far side of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus again sails toward home. People know him back home, and one important man Jairus comes to Jesus with an urgent request.

Jairus (sometimes spelled Jarius) is a leader of the synagogue, which probably meant that he was a prominent member. Whatever else Jairus thought of Jesus' ministry, Jairus must believe in his power.

Jairus comes before Jesus with a parent's most ardent plea: He asks for healing for his young daughter who is gravely ill. Jairus begs Jesus to come with him (5:23).

Just as Jesus' travels are often interrupted by those who call out to him for help, this poignant story of a father's dire concern is interrupted by another impromptu healing story (5:24b-34). Mark uses that interruption to increase our curiosity about what will happen to the young girl.

In this text, as in the account across the water among the Gerasenes, a whole cast of characters enter the drama. In addition to the crowd outside the house, there are professional mourners, the inner circle of disciples, and the members of the immediate household. Yet, the spotlight remains on just two figures-Jesus and the young girl.

Can you name a time when you were deeply troubled or frightened and God heard your cry for help? In what way was

What can you do as a group to show support, compassion, and encouragement to those who have suffered a long time that like the experience of the disciples on the stormy sea? without relief?

Power to Heal READ MARK 5:24B-34.

In our culture we talk about illnesses that are chronic or acute. You can probably name someone who deals with a lifelong disease like diabetes or multiple sclerosis. Perhaps, you yourself, wake each morning to a daily routine to manage your symptoms.

The woman in this passage knew the weight of such a concern for a dozen years. However, none of the physicians she went to see had been able to cure her. She was out of money and out of patience.

Again, the spotlight is focused on just two people-Jesus and the unnamed women. While the crowd hovers all around and the disciples wonder what Jesus is thinking, it is the woman's courage that holds our attention. Like the disciples waking Jesus in 4:38, she is desperate and gutsy enough to reach out a hand to touch Jesus' fringes on his cloak, a non-verbal grasp for something that can heal. She is also courageous enough to step forward when Jesus pauses and wonders who has touched him.

Notice the intimacy that is implied. Both Jesus and the woman recognize the profound power of their encounter. The woman knows that her body has been healed and Jesus recognizes that his power has been extended to someone in need.

When he speaks to her, Jesus addresses her as "daughter." There is no scolding in his voice. Rather, he admires her trust and her desire to be made well. This story offers a contrast to the account of the anxious disciples in the boat in Mark 4:35–41. In both, Jesus brings peace.

Thinking of the women in your study group or others you know, whose story today is like that of the woman in this text?

Back home, again READ MARK 6:1-6.

Jesus is confronted with yet another challenge. Preaching in the local synagogue in Nazareth, those who hear him are both impressed and dubious. The congregation marvels at Jesus' wisdom and power, but they also remember who he was as a boy. Could the child they knew as Mary's son really have such amazing power?

Mark refers to Jesus' family as though we would recognize these relatives: James, Joses, Judas, Simon, some un-named sisters, and his mother, Mary. Scholars debate whether these are siblings, born after Jesus, or perhaps cousins, who in that culture would have been considered to be like brothers or sisters. However we think of them, the main question is: Could God really be present in one as familiar, as ordinary, as this hometown boy?

What you have learned so far about this Jesus of Nazareth? Try to summarize who he really is. What has he come to do?

Looking Ahead

Do you sense the quickening pace in the text? Jesus' reputation as a teacher and a healer is now well established. Jesus does, indeed, care about the people he encounters. Consider how Jesus' compassion towards others sets the tone for our own lives. That will be at the heart of the next session.

Closing Prayer

Gracious Savior, we lift before you all those we know who are dealing with chronic illness, those in crisis, and all who bring comfort and healing to those weighed down by disease. We thank you for your healing mercy praying in the name of Christ Jesus, our solace and our hope. Amen. Me

If Time Permits: Moving On READ MARK 6:6B-29.

Jesus was able to do little in his hometown, a discouragement that might surprise us had Mark not reminded us from the beginning that not everyone was ready to see Jesus for who he truly was. Yet, this setback did not stop Jesus from pursuing the mission he had come to accomplish. And he now expands that mission by sending the disciples out as well.

Previously, the disciples had been sent out to proclaim the good news and to cast out demons in Mark 3:14. Once again we are shown the missionary character of the Christian life.

Like other itinerant preachers and healers in the first century, the disciples are sent with the simplest of accessories—no bread, no bag, no money. With only, a single tunic, these ambassadors will be dependent on the hospitality of others. They will, however, have each other, since they are sent out in pairs. And, they will have a message and God's healing power.

It may seem odd to us that they are admonished to shake the dust from their feet if they meet with rejection. However, in those days Jews, who traveled into foreign territory, would shake the dust from their feet upon returning home. It was a ritual way of acknowledging the exclusive community to which the Jews belonged.

This admonition to travel light focuses attention on the power of God at work in these disciples rather than on their own resources.

7. Name people who have helped you hear the story of Jesus as a story of life-changing power. What allowed them to bear an effective witness to you? (See "Are You Marked?" p. 6.)

Mark offers little transition between Jesus' ministry, the sending out of the disciples, and the final story about King Herod in Mark 6:14–29. We do not know exactly what the king had heard. Certainly, any reports conveyed Jesus' growing reputation in Galilee. People were drawing a connection between Jesus and the ancient prophets of Israel or with John, the fiery wilderness preacher we met in Mark 1.

The later connection is the most troubling for King Herod, as the actions recorded in 6:17–29 illustrate. Did all of this happen in the way Mark suggests? There is no way to know for certain. But even a ruler as powerful as King Herod can be caught in the moral tangle of personal alliances and public reputation.

All attention now shifts from John the Baptizer to Jesus. Whatever unfolds in the coming chapters, it will impact the nations.

If Time Permits: An Open Exchange

What would our "certain young man" (Mark 14:51–52) and others like him today think of the political compromises made by King Herod in Mark 6? What does the rising generation expect of church leaders and public officials?

If you have a conversation partner, read Mark 6:14–29 together. Talk about the ways in which the example of Jesus' life and ministry stands in contrast to that of King Herod.

8. What standards of morality or character should we expect in those who lead our churches, our government offices, and our institutions and corporations in the 21st century?

ne Rev. Patricia Lull is executive director of the St. Paul Area puncil of Churches. She is an ELCA pastor who has served as a

parish pastor, director of ELCA campus ministry, and as dean of students at Luther Seminary in St. Paul.



At first blush, Jesus' parables are quite ordinary: a traveler hits the road, a man plants a garden, laborers work hard at a temporary job. These are common people, engaged in everyday activities, but the plot lines take a surprising twist: a much-feared foreigner offers aid, a tiny weed-seed grows larger than any mustard plant known to humankind, and the people hired at the end of the day earn wages as high as those hired first. It is easy to miss these everyday surprises because we have heard the parables so often that we think we know everything they say.

EILED MEANINGS

magine what it might have been like for the disciples b hear a parable for the first time, without the benefit f group Bible studies, Sunday sermons, or 2,000 years f interpretive history. They did not even have the indsight of a resurrection lens or the experience of the vider church to help them interpret Jesus' sayings.

Consider the parable of the leaven, for example: The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman bok and mixed in with three measures of flour until ll of it was leavened" (Matthew 13:33). On the surace, it is a simple illustration: one sentence describing ne everyday activity of bread baking. But what does mean? The kingdom of God is like... a woman who nakes bread? ... a bit of yeast? ... a bowl of rising ough? Do we understand it differently when we learn hat the biblical Greek text says that the woman hid ne yeast? Or that the yeast would have been a lumpy

blob of sourdough starter? Or that "three measures of flour" equals about 50 or 60 pounds?

Digging a little deeper, we might be perplexed to discover that whenever yeast (leaven) is mentioned in the Bible, it carries a negative connotation. For example, at the institution of the first Passover, Moses relates God's command: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day shall be cut off from Israel" (Exodus 12:15). "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod," Jesus warns (Mark 8:15), while Paul joins in, "Therefore, let us celebrate the festival,

not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:8). In biblical terms, yeast corrupts or contaminates.

Thus, the kingdom of heaven is like a lumpy, contaminating blob of sourdough starter that a woman took and hid in 50 pounds of flour until all of it was leavened. It is not too difficult to imagine the disciples, scratching their heads, staring at Jesus, and saying to themselves, "What is that supposed to mean?"

MANY SHAPES AND SIZES

Most Christians think of parables as short biblical narratives, such as the parables of the good Samaritan and the workers in the vineyard: stories told by Jesus to illustrate religious truths or principles. But parables are more than that. According to the New Testament, as well as in Greco-Roman writings of the period, parables include many kinds of figurative speech. The Greek word, parabol, means to cast alongside, that is, to set something that is well known (like the image of a woman making bread) alongside of something that is less known (like the ways of God). Jesus' parables reveal truths about ourselves and God that might otherwise remain hidden, so that we might hear and understand.

Some New Testament parables take the form of proverbs, comparable to the sayings of a wise aunt, drawn from everyday experience: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old" (Luke 5:36). Other parables contain an explicit comparison to God's reign: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matthew 13:44). Still others are short fables such as the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21), or longer narratives, such as the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32).

TEACHING TOOLS

Parables were a favorite device in Jesus' pedagogical (educational) toolbox; he "told [the crowds] many things in parables" (Matthew 13:3) and he "did not speak to them except in parables" (Mark 4:34). Although the Gospels also convey sayings that are not parables (for example, the sermon on the mount in Matthew), they consistently portray Jesus as one whose words and actions pointed beyond their literal meanings in order to show people who he was and what he was all about.

When Jesus said of himself, "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (John 10:9), obviously he did not mean that he is literally a gate made of wood and nails and a couple of hinges. The saying functions like a parable, even though the Gospel of John does not use that word, by casting Jesus' role as savior in terms of a gate for sheep.

Jesus was not the only person in antiquity to speak in parables. Greco-Roman and Jewish sources reveal that prophets, philosophers, politicians, and others also taught this way. In 2 Samuel 12:1–12, the prophet Nathan tells a parable to King David, who has just ordered the murder of Bathsheba's husband so that he may take Bathsheba as his own wife.

In Nathan's parable, a rich and powerful man who owns many flocks and herds steals a poor man's beloved lamb and prepares it for supper for an out-of-town visitor. After hearing the parable, David expresses outrage against the rich man. "As the Lord lives," he says, "this man deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity" (2 Samuel 12:5–6). What David does not realize is that Nathan has told this parable against him. Not until David pronounces his judgment on the protagonist and Nathan tells him "you are the man," does the parable do its work. Only then does David feel the weight of his sin.

One reason for the popularity of parables for teaching may be their ability to let hearer(s) gain a little distance from a sensitive or difficult topic, just as Nathan's parable did for David. Veiled images encourage people to mull over the implications of various interpretations. They shake us loose from preconceived notions and encourage us to consider that—surprise—we might not have all the answers. Like a good movie or book, a parable can open our eyes to truths about ourselves, about God, and about the world in which we live, even if we have never actually experienced the events depicted in the parable. After Jesus tells the parable of the wickeds tenants, for instance, the chief priests and Pharisees realize that he is speaking about them. They are not happy about it (Matthew 21:33–46).

LISTEN! THEN LISTEN AGAIN!

Imagine that you are passing by when a great crowd gathers alongside the Sea of Galilee. There are so many p!" he calls out, as you all strain closer to hear his lessage. "A sower went out to sow..." The parable escribes a person who scatters seed without regard for here it falls: on the trampled down pathway, on rocky round, in the midst of thorns, and, thankfully, onto bod soil as well. How wasteful and costly, you think yourself, as you hear about hungry birds, scorching in, and choking thorns that prevent the seed from rowing well enough to produce any grain. You marvel the magnificent yield from the seed sown on good oil. "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" Jesus says.

You are listening. You want to hear and understand, at you are uncertain what Jesus means by this tale bout a profligate seed-sower. However, the lesson is hished, and class is dismissed. What do you do now?

Do you leave by the same road that brought you ere, forgetting Jesus' words as soon as you turn vay? Instead, perhaps you get excited about what ou have heard, vowing to come back tomorrow to arn more, but when tomorrow comes there is so uch drama in your life that you forget about the lake and what you heard there.

Or maybe the message intrigues you, but you simby do not have time to think about it today. After all, but need to buy a few things at the store, and besides, bork is stressful, and in this down-sizing economy it is apportant to remain focused on the job. Possibly you excide to stick around after all, to hang out with the sciples and others who are close to Jesus in order to ear what else he has to say.

With any one of those responses you could become our own illustration of Jesus' parable of the sower.

RABLES AS INVITATION

cording to Mark's Gospel, those who seek underanding are rewarded with inside knowledge: "the easure you give will be the measure you get, and all more will be given you" (Mark 4:24). In this case, people close to Jesus (and readers of the Gospel) receive an allegorical explanation of the parable of the sower that portrays hearers of the word in terms of the realities a farmer faces when sowing seed on different kinds of soil. Just as birds, rocks, thorns, and scorching sun can prevent a seedling from flourishing, so too can evil, troubles, persecution, the lure of wealth and the cares of the world get in the way of fruitful faithfulness. Meanwhile, those who "hear the word and accept it" are like good soil that produces fruit in abundance.

The parable and its explanation invite us to linger a bit longer. What does this mean for our own lives? How should we understand? Is the focus on God as the gracious Sower, who offers the word to everybody, whether or not they receive it? Is the emphasis on the hearers of the parable, who are invited to share the word in a similarly extravagant manner? Is the focus, perhaps, on the seed and its ability to bring forth a bountiful harvest (a hundred-fold), as an illustration of how God's word works in spite of the world's propensity to choke it out?

Do we hear a message of encouragement here, a reminder that God's word works even if our churches are shrinking or our faith is small or we fail in our efforts to live out the good news? Do we hear a word of challenge, reminding us to keep our eyes and ears focused on the God who comes to us in Jesus rather than on the obstacles that are so abundant in our culture?



READING: MARK 12:38-44

Generous giving. We all have the ability to be generous givers, but are we sacrificial givers as well? Do we give out of our abundance only? And what does that mean? There is transformative power in our stewardship. We can show others that when we display the generous and,

> yes, sacrificial giving of our time and our resources, we are doing it because it is what God calls us to do-and we are doing it for the sake of others.

If you paint a visual picture in your mind of this reading from Mark, you will see an official treasury where people are not only bringing their offerings but announcing them for all to witness. And what is Jesus doing? He is watching the crowd. Then seeing the poor widow put in everything she had, Jesus calls over his disciples and though he does honor her sacrifice, he also shows his disapproval of those who have so

much more but are only giving "out of their abundance." This passage is asking us to think about sacrifice and why there is not equal sacrifice from all who were in the temple that day. Is Jesus condemning a system where the least of these is sacrificing too much? This story is about more than giving, it's also about justice. We are called as women of faith to grow in our stewardship, to be equal in our sacrifice. And if we care about justice for all, as Jesus did, we will grow in our generosity.

As a member of this community of women committed to justice and discipleship, what are you ready to give up so that you may work more towards God's mission? When you look at the examples of your stewardship, what story does it tell? Does it show what you care most about? Does it show your generosity and your sacrifice?

Our stewardship promise to Women of the ELCA, inspired by our organizational purpose and mission, dem onstrates our desire to shape not only our future women's ministries but also those of the greater church. We must be intentional about connecting our belief about stewardship to the work of the women's organization so we continue to grow in our generosity, encouraging others to do the same.

Emily Hansen is the Women of the ELCA director for stewardship.

The Women of the ELCA 2011-2012 stewardship materials—including the Stewardship Guide and Thankoffering Service were mailed in September to all congregations that have an active Woman of the ELCA unit. You can use the excerpts here in your Bible study circles or other settings and may download the full range of our materials at www.womenoftheelca. org. Click on "Stewardship and Offerings." There you will also find our newly published 2008-2011 Triennial Report.

Women of the Lutheran church have been gathering for Thankoffering Services since the early 1900s. It is a tradition grounded in our celebration of community; meeting together to joyfully give thanks for what God has given us. Nearly 2,000 women celebrated our Thankoffering Service on July 15, 2011, during the 8th Triennial Gathering in Spokane.

2011—2012 Thankoffering Prayers of Intercession

LEADER: In thanksgiving for God's eternal grace, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A Brief Silence

LEADER: We give you thanks for the blessings you pour out upon the church. Empower your people in every land, that we may reflect your goodness and grace.

ALL: Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

LEADER: We give you thanks for the nurture and care you provide the creation. Inspire our love for all you have made that we may live wisely on this earth.

Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great. ALL:

LEADER: We give you thanks for the blessing of peace in our world, in our homes, and in our lives. End conflict and strife among us that we may live in dignity and safety.

ALL: Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

LEADER: We give you thanks for the great things you do for those in need. Restore health to the sick and turn sorrow into joy, anxiety into peace, doubt into trust.

ALL: Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

> We give you thanks for the opportunities to serve you every day. Bless the ministries of the Women of the ELCA that they may be a blessing to others.

ALL: Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

LEADER: We give you thanks for faithful women who have been your servants and witnesses in times past: for Sarah and Ruth; for Deborah and Esther; for Mary, mother of our Lord, and Mary Magdalene; for Catherine of Siena and Julian of Norwich; for Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman; for those women who have touched our lives and nurtured our faith.

ALL: Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

LEADER: Into your hands, O God, we commend ourselves and all for whom we pray, trusting in your abundant mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. Me

TRIENNIAL GATHERING HIGHLIGHTS















More than 2,100 women, spouses, and children attended the 2011 Women of the ELCA triennial gathering in Spokane, Wash., July 14–16. Participants heard inspiring speakers, attended joy-filled worship services; went to workshops, did service projects, met old friends and new, and much more. Here's a fun look at the numbers:

runners, walkers and rollers participated in the Run, Walk and Roll to support "Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls"

\$18,515 was raised on site at the Run, Walk and Roll for a seed grant program to improve the spiritual, physical, and emotional health of women

women donated 3.5 gallons of blood

\$10,420 in gift cards and 11,160 minutes of phone cards were presented in in-kind gifts, as well

600 health kits400 pencils

150 boxes of crayons

325 glue sticks

450 washable markers

250 notebooks

sheets of construction paper

779 bags of socks58 support kits

2,225 prayer shawls

80 quilts

women pre-registered for the 2014 gathering in Charlotte, N.C.

































TRIENNIAL CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS





Prior to the triennial gathering in Spokane July 14–16, the Women of the ELCA held its eighth triennial convention. More than 300 delegates met over two and a half days to conduct the business of the organization.

The delegates elected four officers and 17 board members to serve for the next three years, from 2011–14. They also adopted sev-

eral memorials and resolutions that call for gender justice, an end to hunger, and financial support of Lutheran campus ministries.

One memorial adopted by delegates encourages participants to send offerings to ELCA World Hunger through the churchwide Women of the ELCA organization, to link synodical Web pages to hunger resources, to encourage members

to be hunger leaders and to joir hunger communication networks.

Delegates adopted a \$2.3 million budget for fiscal year 2012, \$110,000 less than the approved budget for 2011. They also approved the audit report for Women of the ELCA.

To read articles, watch videos and see photos from the convention and gathering, visit www.won enoftheelca.org/triennial.





Above left: Delegates engage in Bible study; Above right: Ariel Reed, 17, credentials committee chair; Below left: First-time delegates raise their hands; Below right: Newly elected churchwide board. Front row: Ann Shelton (left), Barbara Martz, Jenny Michael, JoAnn Fuchs, Jackie Wilson, Diane Frederick. Second row: Phyllis Rude (left), Patti Austin, Dona Jenkins, Syd Brinkman, Gwendolynn Edwards, Betty Brandt, Vicki Murph. Back row: Charleen Walker-Horton (left), Deborah Williams, Susan Drane, Kristine Brugamyer, Betsy Baguhn, and Sandra Lange and Ely Smith. The Rev Gwendolyn King is not pictured.



RACE NOTES

Recipes and Memories

Linda Post Bushkofsky



With All Saints Day this month we especially remember those who have died. Candles will be lit, prayers said, memories shared. Many

will look to photo albums, remembering departed friends and loved ones. I'll look to my recipe file.

I have two recipes from Kathryn Berger, the aunt of a friend. Bop, as she was known, never thought of herself as much of a cook, but her corn casserole and cranberry relish recipes say otherwise. My files include an eggplant recipe from Owetis Fry, an Iowa farmer who was like a grandmother to my husband.

I treasure the potato filling recipe of Mabel Schafer, a coffee cake recipe from Dorothy Bartholomew and a pound cake recipe from Kate Deibert (complete with a secret ingredient I was told not to divulge), all women I knew in a former congregation.

My recipe file includes several recipes from Elmira Bushkofsky, my husband's grandmother. Being able to successfully make Grandma's rhubarb crisp recipe was a rite of passage when I joined the Bushkofsky family.

Of course I have several recipes from my mother, Bernice Post, many of which define my childhood memories. I have several of my mother's cookbooks too, complete with her notations written in the margins.

These recipes are very real connections to saints of faith and commitment who have helped shape my life. In many ways these recipes provide stronger memories than any photos might.

I'm writing this column in the midst of the 2011 tornado season. Nearly all of Joplin, Mo., was destroyed. Many portions of Alabama were struck with strong tornadoes that left much destruction in their wake. Tornadoes even struck portions of Massachusetts, leaving little standing. Often victims of tornadoes search after the storm for photos, photos that evoke memories of the past. That's often a futile search. I imagine the same is true about cookbooks and recipe files.

Since I'd be sad to lose any of my treasured photos or recipes, I'm scanning them into digital files. It's a belts-andsuspenders approach to keeping those photos and recipes, ensuring that I'll be able to honor my departed friends and family on many All Saints Days to come.

As our organization approaches its 25th anniversary, thoughts of preserving the history of our mission and ministry are forefront. We are preparing a written history but it can never encompass the mission and ministry of our 7,000-plus congregational units. That history is found in minutes and programs, photos and cookbooks, financial reports and committee records. What steps can you take now to preserve the history of your unit? Go to elca.org and search "regional archives" to find the archives center nearest you for help in preserving your unit's history. And while you're at it, think about ways to both save and share the food memories in your family. You'll be glad you did.

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

Calm Our Fears

by Catherine Malotky

It's pretty clear, God,

that we don't know which way to turn. Our political conversations are spiteful and polarized. Our church conversations can be that way too. And sometimes, too often, we find that kind of speech in our homes and in our own heads.

We are not struggling under an occupying power as Jesus' contemporaries were. If anything we are the occupiers. But there are powers at work in our lives, even if they aren't foreign governments standing guard on our street corners.

There are powers that are way beyond our ability to control. Think of how hateful speech can poison a relationship, whether that relationship is with a group of people or with one person. Remember what it feels like to be afraid of someone you have never met, just because of a group's reputation. Maybe it's as simple as being a conservative among liberals (or visa versa). Or maybe a thinker among doers (or visa versa), or brown among white, or younger among older, or Lutheran among Catholic, or member among non-member, or ailing among healthy, or single among married. The list can go on and on.

We have all been an insider. We have all been afraid, whether we could name it at the time or not. We have hunkered down, circled the wagons, and allied with those like us, clear about just how off those others are, how wrong, how clueless, how judgmental, or how rude. We do this when we are afraid so we can feel as if we are not alone. So we can feel safer.

The irony, of course, is that we do not feel safer. Not really. Such talk exaggerates the threat of the other, and widens the gap between us. Like the disciples in the boat, with the wind whipped up and the waves knocking us off balance again and again, our fear is a storm that threatens to swamp our relationships and send us to the bottom.

The question is, can we, modern humans, awaken Jesus and cry out to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Our world can bring us to this point. Our young are killed and maimed in war, trafficked for the sexual pleasure of others, and seduced by a consumer culture that is unfazed by their choking debt. Why shouldn't we be afraid of others when we see what we see?

What would happen if we did cry out to Jesus? What happens when we do? Jesus can command the wind and wave of our fears. He can teach us to see in ourselves and others God's handiwork, as well as hold ourselves and others accountable to respect and treasure this handiwork among us. He can unplug the power of hateful speech by loving each and every one of us into the communion of saints, so we can leave the old alliances behind.

Jesus, calm the storms of our fears. Bring us together as yours, beloved. Amen.

The Rev. Catherine Malotky, an ELCA pastor serves at Luther Seminary as a philanthropic adviser. She has served as a parish pastor, editor teacher, and retreat leader.



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